Student Edition

California Education and the Environment Initiative

7

History-Social Science Standard 7.2.5.

Arabic Trade Networks: Growth and Expansion in the Middle Ages

California Education and the Environment Initiative

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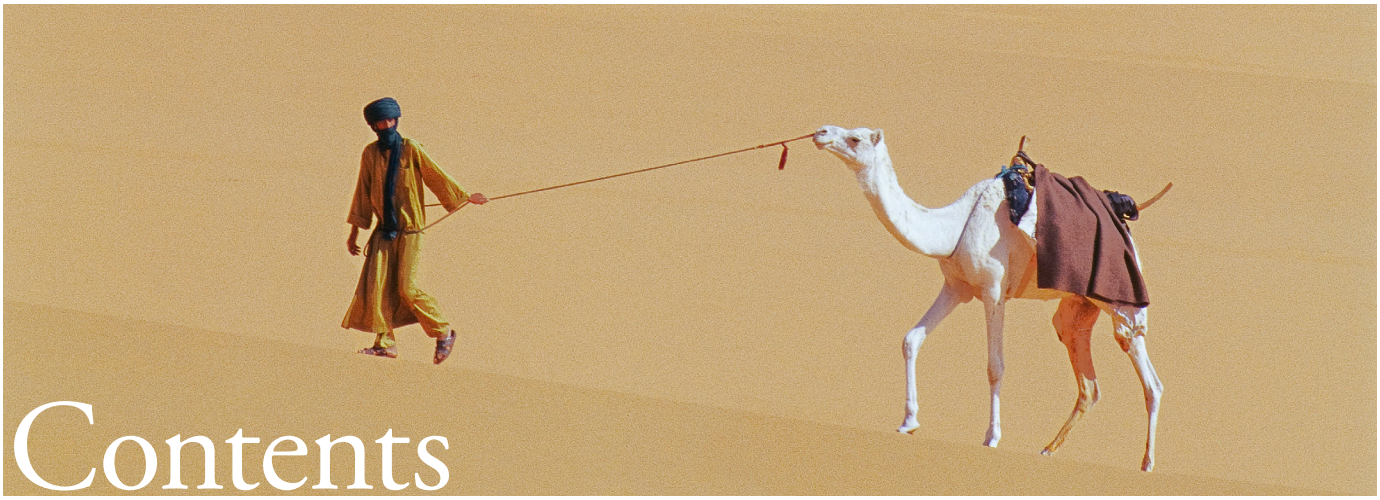

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Beyond the "Royal Road"

At 7:00 a.m., Roberto Ruiz sits patiently in his car as he does every weekday morning. He looks out over the long lines of cars, vans, and trucks all around him waiting to cross the border from Mexico to the United States. People traveling on foot gather alongside the road, laughing and chatting.

Even though he lives in Tijuana, Mexico, Roberto works in San Diego. He crosses the international border at San Ysidro, the busiest border crossing in the Western Hemisphere. On some days, he may wait in the line of traffic for more than an hour. When Roberto finally moves past the border officials, he is happy to see the straight lanes of Interstate 5 (I-5) stretching out before him. He puts his foot on the gas and picks up speed, hoping that he will not be late for work.

Wheat field

Roberto will only be traveling on I-5 to and from work today. He knows, however, that this highway stretches all the way to the Canadian border. It is 1,381 miles long and connects many important cities and the capitals of California, Oregon, and Washington along its length.

Following Old Paths

Interstate 5 follows the same paths used by people long before there were countries and the borders between them in this part of the world. American Indians first forged these paths to look for game and to gather food in different seasons. Then, in 1769, a few settlers and Catholic *padres* arrived from Spain and Mexico. They built *presidios* (forts) and missions in central and Southern California. The

padres and soldiers traveled along a narrow footpath from mission to mission and from fort to fort. They carried supplies and news. The path started in Baja California Sur (Mexico), where the first two missions were built. They named the path *El Camino Real*, which means "The Royal Road" or "King's Road."

Where *El Camino Real* ended, other paths continued north. Hunters and trappers traveled from the Central Valley in California to Oregon on an ancient route called the Siskiyou Trail. The trail climbed up one side of Mt. Shasta. Then it wound down the steep mountain to the valley below. In 1837, Ewing Young drove 700 cattle north over this trail. He delivered the cattle to families who had recently settled in Oregon. A few years later during the Gold Rush, many more people would use this trail to come south and seek their fortunes in California.

By the 1860s, people were traveling *El Camino Real* and the Siskiyou Trail by wagon and stagecoach. The paths had become trenched and pitted with holes. Roads were graded and holes filled.

I-5 in California

People could move freely from one end of the state to the other. It took another 50 years, however, for people to begin paving these roads. It was not until 1912, that the first section of *El Camino Real* was paved. It became one of California's first state highways.

Paving New Roads

In 1915, the Pacific Highway was dedicated. ("Pacific" means peaceful.) The new automobile route stretched from Canada to Mexico over parts of the Siskiyou Trail and *El Camino Real*. Travel on the Pacific Highway, however, was a wild adventure because most of the road was rough and difficult to drive on. As automobile travel and trade increased between California, Oregon, Washington, Canada, and Mexico, the U.S. federal government stepped in. They helped create a system of numbered "interstate highways" to help people and goods travel more quickly and safely. Signs on these roads would all be the same, even as they crossed state lines (but not international borders).

U.S. Route 101 (Highway 101) was one of the first major routes to be commissioned. It

Peace Arch at the I-5 U.S.A./Canada border

was built on much of the old Pacific Highway. But it ended before reaching the Canadian border. Highway 101 is the most western route in the U.S. highway system. In the past, it was a major artery for commerce moving up and down the coast. It is still a favorite route for those traveling to San Francisco and the northern coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington.

Another highway that was part of the federal plan was Highway 99. "Route 99" ran like a backbone through Central California. The highway began at the Mexican border. It followed El Camino Real as it passed through San Diego and through the L.A. basin. The road climbed over the Ridge Route and passed through the town of Bakersfield. Leaving the Central Valley, the highway closely followed the old Siskiyou Trail to the border of the U.S. and Canada. Highway 99 carried most of the agricultural and industrial goods produced in California to other places over three decades.

Constructing a System

All interstate highways became part of the National Highway System in 1956. Roads under this system had to meet certain government standards: They had to connect to major cities and industrial centers. They had to follow the most direct route(s) from one city to the next. In case of disaster, they had to provide safe and efficient escape routes. They had to allow for the safe transport of military troops and equipment. And, (if possible) they had to provide crossing points for travelers and goods going into and coming from other countries (Canada and Mexico). From this system came the road we know today as Interstate 5.

Interstate 5 is the major north-south interstate highway on the West Coast. I-5 was built on top of much of the

old Highway 99 through the Central Valley. From Mexico, through San Diego to Anaheim, it follows the original route of *El Camino Real*. From the Central Valley to the border of Canada, I-5 follows the old Siskiyou Trail.

Most of the goods that Californians use and make travel along I-5. It is the major artery carrying agricultural products to the cities outside of the state and to shipping centers in Stockton and Sacramento. Tourists use the interstate to reach their vacation destinations quickly and safely. Daily commuters, like Roberto Ruiz, drive from their homes to work using I-5. Around 299,000 people travel some distance on Interstate 5 each day. Each year, around 300 million people cross the international borders into Canada and Mexico, via I-5.

At 7:00 p.m., Roberto Ruiz is glad to be driving home after work. As he leaves San Diego, the Sun is setting. It will soon be dark. The traffic on Interstate 5 begins to back up before he reaches San Ysidro. Though he has waited until 7 in the evening, there are still people waiting to cross the border into Mexico. Roberto eases back into the seat of his car. He has heard that the border crossing will be expanded this year. More check points and lanes will be built to handle the travelers and trade crossing the border each day. Until then, he will just have to wait in line.

Bags of cement ready for shipping

Life and Trade on the Arabian Peninsula

Water has always been central to life on the Arabian Peninsula. On the one hand, a scarcity of water has shaped every aspect of people's lives, from where they lived to what they did. But the peninsula itself was surrounded by water. Seas and gulfs separate Arabia from the rest of the world. The peninsula's location made it an important trade center in the Middle Ages and brought its people into contact with other ancient civilizations.

The Arabian Peninsula has a dry, harsh climate. Although the peninsula is nearly surrounded by water, fresh water, which is essential for life, is scarce there. Because there was so little water, the peninsula's early people were nomads. They lived in small family groups, and moved from oasis to oasis, seeking water and grasslands where their camels, goats, and sheep could graze. Romans called these Arab nomads *Bedouins*.

Sahara Desert oasis

Arabia has no rivers or lakes. To grow food, people had to use water from rainfall, springs, and groundwater. Some of the oases in the middle of the peninsula had enough water to support farming. Small groups of Arab families settled in these oases. They grew grain and vegetables. When nomadic members of their clan or tribe visited, the residents in the oasis offered them food in exchange for animals, meat, or other things. The paths between these oases that the

Bedouins traveled were the first "trade routes" on the peninsula.

Where fresh water was easier to get, Arab people settled and built larger communities. Springs that flowed from the mountains provided enough water for farming on the west coast, called the *Hejaz*. However, the best place for farming was on the southern coast. Most of the rain falls in the southern part of Arabia. Monsoon winds from the Indian Ocean bring seasonal rain to the mountains there. This rain allowed the people of southern Arabia to farm almost year round. In this area, the population grew and Arabia's first kingdoms arose. The best known of these was Sa'ba. The people of Sa'ba built dams and reservoirs to help store water from the rainy season for use during the dry season.

Al-Ta'if, to the north of Sa'ba, on the west coast of Arabia, came to be known as the "garden of the *Hejaz*." Al-Ta'if was a small town in the mountains. People grew wheat, grapes, apples, figs, pomegranates, and dates there. The land had plenty of freshwater springs. The people of Al-Ta'if dug wells and perfected irrigation tools and methods invented in ancient Egypt. They passed on what they learned to Arabs living in the oases in the middle of the peninsula.

Arabia was surrounded by the ancient empires of Europe, Asia, and the rest of the Middle East. These ancient empires were trade partners. Goods traveled between Rome and the kingdoms of Africa, India, and China. The empires battled with one another for control of the trade going on among them. The people in these empires knew of Arabia. The Romans had a special name for Arabia. They called it *Arabia Felix* ("Happy Arabia").

Most of this trade took place across the Indian Ocean. The monsoon winds that brought rain to the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula every year

Overland caravan route

Arab cloth merchants

powered the ships crossing the ocean. The winds blow from the east to the west in the winter (the dry season), and from the west to the east in summer (the rainy season). Trading ships from China and India used these winds to sail across the Arabian Sea to the west in winter. Ships from Arabia sailed across the sea to the east in spring. The cities of Aden and Cane, on the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, soon became popular places for these ships to stop before making the journey east, or north into the Red Sea.

Soon, two major trade routes were passing through Arabia. The first was the maritime route between Africa and India. Goods from the east and west were unloaded from ships at Aden and Cane, and goods from Arabia itself took their place. Products such as frankincense and myrrh—made from the sap of trees that grew in the mountains around Sa'ba, and used as incense and in perfumes—brought great wealth to the area.

The other trade route crossed overland using camel caravans. The caravans went up and down the west coast and crossed over the middle of the peninsula between Mecca and Medina, and the Persian Gulf. Goods on these caravan routes came south from Egypt and the Mediterranean to the port cities in southern Arabia. There they were loaded onto ships bound for Africa or India. Goods from India and Asia that were unloaded at Aden or Cane traveled north on these overland routes to cities in eastern Arabia and the rest of the Middle East.

As trade on the Arabian Peninsula grew, Sa'ba became a center of power. Sa'ba was located on the overland trade route and near the popular port of Aden. Because of its location, Sa'ba was soon known throughout Europe and Asia as the place

to go to find exotic plants, spices, new and interesting beverages, and fabrics. People from Rome to China wanted goods from Sa'ba and sent merchants there to find goods to trade. Some of those merchants settled in Sa'ba permanently.

Another Arab city that rose in importance at this time was Mecca. Mecca was located on the caravan route across the desert and close to the port city of Jeddah. Like Sa'ba, Mecca grew powerful from the trade and goods that passed through its streets on its way to other lands. Mecca was also important in another way. Many Arab people came to Mecca to worship at the temples and mosques there. The people visiting Mecca for religious reasons helped business, and the population of Mecca and the surrounding towns grew.

Spices at an Arab market

Baghdad and the cities to the north of the Arabian Peninsula became popular among traders using the old Silk Road. Almost a million people lived in Baghdad by 1200 CE (Common Era). It was one of the most important commercial centers in the world, its leaders controlling all overland trade between Europe and China. To the west, the cities of Damascus and Aleppo grew in importance as they exchanged goods with Baghdad. From Damascus and Aleppo, goods made their way to markets in Constantinople and the rest of Europe. Nearby Basra grew to become the most important town on the Persian Gulf.

Region	Goods and Products		
China	Camphor/perfumes	Paper	Silk
	Dyes (Cinnabar)	Peaches	Silk products
	Ginger	Porcelain (pottery)	Storax (a spice)
Borneo, Java, and Sumatra	Areca	Coconut	Mango
	Bananas	Coral	Nutmeg
	Betel leaf	Dyes (sappanwood)	Rice
	Cinnamon	Lemons/limes	Sugarcane
	Cloves	Mace	Tin
India (including Tibet)	Ambergris	Cotton fabrics	Musk
	Black pepper	Coconut/palm oil	Pearls
	Calamus (spice)	Cowrie shells	Perfumes
	Cardamom	Dyes (saffron, indigo)	Plantains
	Cinnamon	Ghee (butter)	Rice
	Coral	Iron	Rubies
	Cotton	Kohl (make-up)	Sapphires
Arabia	Aloes	Durum wheat	Horses
	Arak-wood	Dyes (Curcuma)	Leather products
	Camels	Figs	Myrrh
	Coffee	Frankincense/perfume	Pomegranates
	Cotton fabrics	Gems	
	Dates	Gold	
Egypt	Balsam	Dyes (safflower)	Paper
	Cotton	Fine linen	Sugar
	Cotton fabrics	Garnet/quartz beads	Vinegar

Region	Goods and Products		
Persia	Copper Dill Durum wheat Dyes (Indigo)	Iron Jasmine/perfume Metalwares Pomegranates	Quince Rose water Saffron Silver
Mesopotamia	Almonds Carpets Citron Cucumber Dates Dyes (tyrian) Figs	Grapes Linen Metal jewelry and ornaments Nuts Paper Silk cloth	Silver Steel Swords Tapestries Wheat Wool
East Africa	Ambergris Castor oil	Coffee Ivory	Watermelon
North Africa	Dates Gold Leather	Olives Olive oil Palm fruit	Rice Salt Tortoise shell
Andalus	Citron Figs Leather products	Lemons Oranges Olives	Steel Sugarcane Swords
Europe	Amber Flax Fur	Glass Grapes Linen cloth	Marble Walnuts Woolen cloth

Background: Nasir Khusraw was a Persian poet. In the middle of the 11th century, he traveled to Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt. On his trip, he kept a diary. At the time of his journey, Cairo was the capital of the western Islamic empire. The Sultan of Egypt controlled all of Egypt, the North African coast, and Sicily. To the east, he ruled Mecca and Medina. He also controlled Syria, Palestine, and Jerusalem.

In this account, Khusraw describes the port city of Tripoli.

> The whole neighborhood of the town is occupied by fields, and gardens, and trees. The sugarcane grows here luxuriously, as likewise orange and citron trees; also the banana, the lemon, and the date. The city of Tripoli belongs to the Sultan of Egypt... There is always a body of the Sultan's troops in garrison here, with a commander set over them, to keep the city safe from the enemy... [A]ll ships that come from the coasts of the Greeks and the Franks, and from Andalusia, and the Western lands [called Maghrib], have to pay a tithe [tax] to the Sultan; which sums are employed for the rations of the garrison. The Sultan also has ships of his own here, which sail to Byzantium and Sicily and the West, to carry merchandise.

Source: Halsall, Paul, ed. "Internet Medieval Sourcebook." Fordham University.
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html

Background: Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta was a scholar. He studied Islamic law. He began his travels in 1325 CE. For 30 years, he traveled throughout Afroeurasia. His travels took him almost 70,000 miles.

The account that follows describes his visit to Sarai, along the old Silk Road.

On the fourth day we reached the city of Sara [Sarai], which is the capital of the sultan. We visited him, and after we had answered his questions about our journey and the king of the Greeks and his city, he gave orders for our maintenance and lodging. Sara is one of the finest of towns, of immense extent and crammed with inhabitants, with fine bazaars and wide streets. The bazaars handled metalware, leather, woven silk and woolens. [From the local countryside came] grain, furs, timber, and slaves. We rode out one day with one of the principal men of the town, intending to make a circuit of the place and find out its size. We were living at one end of it and we set out in the morning, and it was after midday when we reached the other… The inhabitants belong to diverse nations… Each group lives in a separate quarter with its own bazaars. [Arab] Merchants and strangers from Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere, live in a quarter surrounded by a wall, in order to protect their property.

Source: Halsall, Paul, ed. "Internet Medieval Sourcebook." Fordham University.
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In the account that follows, Battuta describes the port city of Málaga. His guide is an Arab merchant.

On the morrow [my guide] rode with me and we reached Málaga, which is one of the largest and most beautiful towns of Andalusia. It unites the conveniences of both sea and land, and is abundantly supplied with foodstuffs and fruits. I saw grapes being sold in its bazaars at the rate of eight pounds for a small dirham (an Arab coin), and its ruby-colored Murcian [a kingdom in southeastern Spain] pomegranates have no equal in the world. As for figs and almonds, they are exported from Málaga and its outlying districts to the lands both of the East and the West. At Málaga there is manufactured excellent gilded pottery, which is exported thence to the most distant lands. Its mosque covers a large area and has a reputation for sanctity; the court of the mosque is of unequalled beauty, and contains exceptionally tall orange trees.

Source: Halsall, Paul, ed. "Internet Medieval Sourcebook." Fordham University.
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html

The Silent Traveler

Strange things happened in China in the 1330s. Torrential rains, then drought and earthquakes battered large parts of the region. To some people, it seemed like the world would end. However, people were not the only living things affected by these events. The floods, droughts, and earthquakes affected other living things, too.

Take rats, for example. Rain, drought, and earthquakes destroyed rat habitats, forcing populations of rats to migrate from the areas where they had lived for thousands of years. When they moved, the fleas on the rats moved, too. Some of the fleas on these rats carried bacteria that cause a disease called bubonic plague. Bubonic plague is named for the *buboes*, or dark spots, that appear on the skin of a person infected with the bacteria. The spots are made up of blood, caused by internal bleeding. Fleas spread the bacteria when they bit the rats. Rats with no immunity to the bacteria got sick and died. When so many rats died that the fleas needed other hosts, the fleas began feeding on farm animals… and then humans.

The bubonic plague broke out in China in 1331. By the 1350s, according to some reports, it had killed two out of every three people in China.

But that was only the beginning. The plague spread. It spread along the trade routes across Africa, Europe, and Asia during the Middle Ages. From China, rats (and their fleas) stowed away in the goods being carried west along the Silk Road into Central Asia and brought the infectious bacteria with them. It found a home in Samarkand. From there, traders unknowingly helped the bacteria move south into India and west toward Europe.

By 1346, the bacteria had reached the Caspian Sea, including the town of Sarai, visited by Ibn Battuta. After Sarai, the plague moved west to Caffa, on the northern edge of the Black Sea. From Caffa, the disease traveled west to Constantinople. At the same time, traders from Italy, who traveled to Caffa often, brought the bacteria to Genoa. From there, the plague entered Western Europe in 1347. It spread to Alexandria and Cairo in 1347 and 1348. It entered Damascus and Baghdad in 1348. Traders and pilgrims carried the plague from the north and west to Mecca, infecting the whole of the Arabian Peninsula.

Two things about life in the 1300s made it easy for the plague to spread. First, people were traveling farther than they had ever traveled before. Ships and other modes of transportation,

Black death

along with the growing trade routes, made it possible for people (and rats and fleas) to journey long distances. Second, people in the trade centers and cities along the trade routes lived in very crowded conditions. That made it easy for bacteria to move from one person to another. In these conditions, it was very difficult to separate the sick from those that were not. Some towns along the trade routes tried closing themselves off to all visitors. They hoped that doing so would help them escape the plague. Some farmers freed their livestock. They drove them away from towns and settlements in the hope that they would avoid infection.

Aftermath of the plague

Had people been more scattered or more isolated at this time, the plague would probably have been contained to a few areas. If the trade routes had not existed, the bacteria responsible for the plague might have stayed in the Gobi Desert until some later time. As all living things do, the plague bacteria evolved and mutated over time. Other living things changed as well, developing immunities to the changing strains of bacteria. The pandemic that began in China in 1331, seemed to "die out" in 1352. By the time the plague ended, one-third of the populations in Europe, Arabia, the Middle East, and North Africa had died.

With one-third of the humans in Afroeurasia gone, other changes occurred. Because there were fewer people, the workers that were left demanded higher pay for their labor. Some of the people who survived took over the lands and trade of those that had died. That made them better off than they had been before. However, so many deaths weakened the human communities overall. In some places, whole villages were abandoned. In short, Afroeurasia's natural and social systems were permanently altered by plague. This would bring about the end of the Middle Ages and the start of a new period in human history.

Spanish Rice

Arab merchants brought rice to Spain. It is such a basic food source for so many millions of people around the world that we seldom give it a second thought. Yet, by looking carefully at rice, we can learn a lot about history, commerce, and the connections between people. We can compare different recipes that people use to prepare rice. We can also compare the words they use to describe it and the things associated with rice.

Before we begin, how about just a little background about rice? It originated in Southeast Asia or India (the Tamil name for rice is *arisi*) and quickly spread to Persia and China in ancient times. Rice requires a tremendous amount of water to grow. To grow rice, farmers must flood the seedlings in a flat field. Farmers often dig fields, called terraces, out of the sides of mountains. Even these fields must be flooded. The flooding also prevents competing weeds from outgrowing the rice. Once the rice seedlings have established themselves, farmers drain the field. The flooded fields provide a habitat for birds (herons and warblers, for example). They also create a home for amphibians and snakes. These predators control insect and mammal pests. Many people even raise fish in rice paddies, creating a system that supplies almost all of the food they need.

It is possible to grow rice in dry regions, but it grows best with lots of water. Arab people knew how to provide the water, even in places where they had to get it from far away. They had advanced knowledge about irrigation. When they needed water in a particular place, they built dams, channels, and used other devices to move it there. Complex systems of gates and canals controlled the flow of water. They invented machines that lifted water out of canals. Confident in their ability, Arab merchants and immigrants carried rice seeds with them on their travels on the trade network, causing rice to move from India and the highlands of Persia to Syria, Arabia, North Africa, the Balkans, and Spain.

The Arabic word for rice is *ar-ruz*. In Spanish, the word is *arroz*. Many Americans eat *arroz con pollo* (chicken), or something called "Spanish rice." Spanish rice actually comes from a traditional Arab meal. In it, the cook took whatever meat was available and stir-fried it in olive oil (another important Spanish crop). The cook then added local vegetables

Flooded rice field

Spanish *paella*

and water. The mixture was boiled to create a broth. Once the broth was flavorful, the cook added dry rice and saffron to the pot and cooked them. Maybe you already know the name of this popular traditional meal. Some say it comes from the Spanish word for the wide, shallow frying pan used to prepare it… the *paella*.

Saffron, by the way, is an ancient and popular spice that comes from the flower of a single type of plant. It is hard to produce and is still one of the most expensive spices in the world. It has a slightly bitter taste but smells like sweet hay. It also produces a strong golden-yellow color that it passes on to the food in which it is cooked. For this reason, people also use saffron as a dye. Saffron was very popular in the Middle Ages and Arab merchants traded it widely.

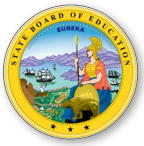
A story about the origins of paella is informative. Cooks or servants of Arab royalty took leftovers from large banquets and mixed them in pans of rice to take home and feed their families. In this version of history, the Arabic word *baqiyah*, which means "leftovers," was the source of the Spanish word paella.

There are other theories regarding the history of the dish. In the days of Alexander the Great, Persians served a rice dish that is only slightly different from paella. They fried the rice in oil first, before adding the broth made of local meats and/or vegetables. The name of this meal, in Persian, is *pilau* (pe-lou). The closeness of this word to the Spanish word, and of the recipe to the Spanish recipe, suggests a connection between the two. In other words, the people who made it first probably influenced those who made it later (even if they use a slightly different word to name it).

But that is not all. Today, *pilaf* has several different names, depending on where it is ordered. Most commonly, people call it "rice pilaf." In Bosnia, Serbia, and Turkey, however, they call it *pilav*. The word in Romania is pilaf. In Afghanistan, people call it *palow*; in India and Pakistan, *pulao*; and in Uzbek and Russia, *plov*. In these places, all once part of the Arab trade network, the similarity of the names suggests that the meal has a common origin.

The idea of frying the rice first, of course, should remind many Americans of Chinese fried rice. There are many kinds of fried rice, all with different ingredients. Just as in Spain, different vegetables and meats are available in different regions of China. Locally available ingredients determine each type of fried rice.

Also of interest is the fact that many Chinese find the crispy, toasted rice from the bottom of the pan to be the best part of fried rice. Spaniards also consider this part of paella to be a delicacy. An Arab eating paella in Córdoba in the 14th century probably was served in a bowl made of Chinese porcelain.



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